AN

# ESSAY

ON

# *CRITICISM.*

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Written by Mr. POPE

——*Si quid novisti rectius istis,*
*Candidus imperti; si non, his utere mecum.*
HORAT.

The SECOND EDITION.

*LONDON:*
Printed for *W. Lewis* in *Russel-Street Covent-Garden.* MDCCXIII.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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# AN ESSAY ON CRITICISM.

'TIS hard to say, if greater Want of Skill
Appear in *Writing* or in *Judging* ill;
But, of the two, less dang'rous is th' Offence,
To tire our *Patience*, than mis-lead our *Sense*.
Some few in *that*, but Numbers err in *this*,
Ten Censure wrong for one who Writes amiss;
A *Fool* might once *himself* alone expose,
Now *One* in *Verse* makes many more in *Prose*.

Tho' Judgment, as our Watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In *Poets* as true *Genius* is but rare,
True *Taste* as seldom is the *Critick*'s Share;
Both must alike from Heav'n derive their Light,
These *born* to Judge, as well as those to Write.
† Let such teach others who themselves excell,
And *censure freely* who have *written well*.
*Authors* are partial to their *Wit*, 'tis true,
But are not *Criticks* to their *Judgment* too?
Yet if we look more closely, we shall find
* Most have the *Seeds* of Judgment in their Mind;
Nature affords at least a *glimm'ring Light*; [*right*.
The *Lines*, tho' touch'd but *faintly*, are drawn
But as the slightest Sketch, if justly trac'd,
Is by ill *Colouring* but the more disgrac'd,
So by *false Learning* is good Sense defac'd.
Some are bewilder'd in the Maze of Schools,
And some made *Coxcombs* Nature meant but *Fools*.

† *Qui scribit artificiosè, ab aliis commodè scripta facile intelligere poterit.* Cic. ad. Herenn. lib. 4.

* *Omnes tacito quodam sensu, sine ulla arte, aut ratione, quæ sint in artibus ac rationibus rectè ac prava dijudicant.* Cic. de Orat. lib. 2.

In search of Wit these lose their common Sense,
And then turn Critics in their own Defence:
Those hate as Rivals all that write; and others
But envy Wits, as Eunuchs envy Lovers.
All Fools have still an Itching to deride,
And fain wou'd be upon the Laughing Side:
If Mævius Scribble in Apollo's spight,
There are, who judge still worse than he can write.
Some have at first for Wits, then Poets past,
Turn'd Criticks next, and prov'd plain Fools at last.
Some neither can for Wits nor Criticks pass,
As heavy Mules are neither Horse nor Ass.
Those half-learn'd Witlings, num'rous in our Isle,
As half-form'd Insects on the Banks of Nile;
Unfinish'd Things, one knows not what to call,
Their Generation's so equivocal:
To tell 'em, wou'd a hundred Tongues require,
Or one vain Wit's, that might a hundred tire.
But you who seek to give and merit Fame,
And justly bear a Critick's noble Name,
Be sure your self and your own Reach to know,
How far your Genius, Taste, and Learning go;

Launch not beyond your Depth, but be discreet,
And mark *that Point* where Sense and Dulness meet.
Nature to all things fix'd the Limits fit,
And wisely curb'd proud Man's pretending Wit.
As on the Land while *here* the Ocean gains,
In *other Parts* it leaves wide sandy Plains;
Thus in the Soul while *Memory* prevails,
The solid Pow'r of *Understanding* fails;
Where Beams of warm *Imagination* play,
The *Memory*'s soft Figures melt away.
One *Science* only will one *Genius* fit;
So *vast* is Art, so *narrow* Human Wit:
Not only bounded to *peculiar Arts*,
But *oft* in *those*, confin'd to *single Parts*.
Like Kings we lose the Conquests gain'd before,
By vain Ambition still t'extend them more.
Each might his *sev'ral Province* well command,
Would all but *stoop* to what they *understand*.
First follow NATURE, and your Judgment frame
By her just Standard, which is still the same:
*Unerring Nature*, still divinely bright,
One *clear*, *unchang'd*, and *Universal* Light,
Life,

Life, Force, and Beauty, muſt to all impart,
At once the *Source*, and *End*, and *Teſt* of *Art*.
That *Art* is beſt which moſt reſembles *Her*;
Which ſtill *preſides*, yet never does *Appear*.
In ſome fair Body thus the ſprightly Soul
With Spirits feeds, with Vigour fills the whole,
Each Motion guides, and ev'ry Nerve ſuſtains;
*It ſelf unſeen*, but in th' *Effects*, remains.
There are whom Heav'n has bleſt with ſtore of [Wit,
Yet want as much again to manage it;
For *Wit* and *Judgment* ever are at ſtrife,
Tho' meant each other's Aid, like *Man* and *Wife*.
'Tis more to *guide* than *ſpur* the Muſe's Steed;
Reſtrain his Fury, than provoke his Speed;
The winged Courſer, like a gen'rous Horſe,
Shows moſt true Mettle when you *check* his Courſe.

Thoſe RULES of old *diſcover'd*, not *devis'd*,
Are *Nature* ſtill, but *Nature Methodiz'd*:
*Nature*, like *Monarchy*, is but reſtrain'd
By the ſame Laws which firſt *herſelf* ordain'd.

Firſt learned *Greece* juſt Precepts did indite,
When to repreſs, and when indulge our Flight.

High

High on *Parnassus'* Top her Sons she show'd,
And pointed out those arduous Paths they trod,
Held from afar, aloft, th' Immortal Prize,
And urg'd the rest by equal Steps to rise.
From great *Examples* useful *Rules* were giv'n;
She drew from *them* what they deriv'd from *Heav'n*.
The gen'rous Critick fann'd the *Poet's Fire*,
And taught the World, *with Reason* to *Admire*.
Then Criticism the Muses Handmaid prov'd,
To dress her Charms, and make her more belov'd:
But following Wits from that Intention stray'd;
Who could not win the *Mistress*, woo'd the *Maid*:
*Set up themselves*, and drove a *sep'rate* Trade:
Against the Poets *their own Arms* they turn'd,
Sure to hate most the Men from whom they *learn'd*.
So modern *Pothecaries*, taught the Art
By *Doctor's Bills* to play the *Doctor's Part*,
Bold in the Practice of *mistaken Rules*,
Prescribe, apply, and call their *Masters Fools*.
*Some* on the Leaves of ancient Authors prey,
Nor *Time* nor *Moths* e'er spoil'd so much as they.

*Some*

Some dryly plain, without Invention's Aid,
Write dull *Receits* how Poems may be made.
These lost the Sense, their Learning to display,
And those explain'd the Meaning quite away.
You then whose Judgment the right Course would steer,
Know well each Ancient's proper Character;
His *Fable*, *Subject*, *Scope* in ev'ry Page;
*Religion*, *Country*, *Genius* of his *Age*:
Without all these at once before your Eyes,
*Cavil* you may, but never *Criticize*.
Be Homer's Works your *Study*, and *Delight*,
Read them by Day, and meditate by Night;
Thence form your Judgment, thence your Notions bring,
And trace the Muses upward to their Spring.
Still with *It self* compar'd, his *Text* peruse;
And let your *Comment* be the *Mantuan Muse*.

* When first young *Maro* sung of *Kings* and *Wars*,
Ere warming *Phœbus* touch'd his trembling Ears;
Perhaps he seem'd *above* the Critick's Law,
And but from *Nature's Fountains* scorn'd to draw:

* Virgil Eclog. 6. *Cum canerem Reges & Prælia, Cynthius aurem vellit* ——

But

But when t'examine ev'ry Part he came,
*Nature* and *Homer* were, he found, the *ſame*:
Convinc'd, amaz'd, he checkt the bold Deſign,
And did his Work to Rules as ſtrict confine,
As if the *Stagyrite* o'erlook'd each Line.
Learn hence for Ancient *Rules* a juſt Eſteem;
To copy *Nature* is to copy *Them*.

Some Beauties yet, no Precepts can declare,
For there's a *Happineſs* as well as *Care*.
*Muſick* reſembles *Poetry*, in each
Are nameleſs *Graces* which no Methods teach,
And which a *Maſter-Hand* alone can reach.
† If, where the *Rules* not far enough extend,
(Since Rules were made but to promote their End)
Some Lucky LICENCE anſwers to the full
Th'Intent propos'd, *that Licence* is a *Rule*:
Thus *Pegaſus*, a nearer way to take,
May boldly deviate from the common Track.
Great Wits ſometimes may *gloriouſly offend*,
And *riſe* to Faults true Criticks *dare not* mend;

† *Neque tam ſancta ſunt iſta Præcepta, ſed hoc quicquid eſt, Utilitas excogitavit; Non negabo autem ſic utile eſſe plerumque; verum ſi eadem illa nobis aliud ſuadebit utilitas, hanc, relictis magiſtrorum autoritatibus, ſequamur.* Quintil. l. 2. cap. 13.

From

From vulgar Bounds with *brave Diſorder* part,
And *ſnatch* a *Grace* beyond the Reach of Art,
Which, without paſſing thro' the *Judgment*, gains
The *Heart*, and all its End *at once* attains.
In *Proſpects*, thus, ſome *Objects* pleaſe our Eyes,
Which *out of* Nature's *common Order* riſe,
The ſhapeleſs *Rock*, or hanging *Precipice*.
But Care in Poetry muſt ſtill be had,
It asks *Diſcretion* ev'n in *running Mad*:
And tho' the *Ancients* thus their *Rules* invade,
(As *Kings* diſpenſe with *Laws* Themſelves have made)
*Moderns*, beware! Or if you muſt offend
Againſt the *Precept*, ne'er tranſgreſs its *End*;
Let it be *ſeldom*; and *compell'd by Need*;
And have, at leaſt, *Their Precedent* to plead.
The Critick elſe proceeds without Remorſe,
Seizes your Fame, and puts his Laws in force.

I know there are, to whoſe preſumptuous Thoughts
Thoſe *Freer Beauties*, ev'n in *Them*, ſeem Faults.
Some Figures *monſtrous* and *miſ-ſhap'd* appear,
Conſider'd *ſingly*, or beheld too *near*,

Which, but *proportion'd* to their *Light*, or *Place*,
Due Diſtance *reconciles* to Form and Grace.
A prudent Chief not always muſt diſplay
His Pow'rs in *equal Ranks*, and *fair Array*,
But with th' *Occaſion* and the *Place* comply,
*Conceal* his Force, nay ſeem ſometimes to *Fly*.
Thoſe oft are *Stratagems* which *Errors* ſeem,
Nor is it *Homer Nods*, but *We* that *Dream*.

Still green with Bays each *ancient* Altar ſtands,
Above the reach of *Sacrilegious* Hands;
Secure from *Flames*, from *Envy's* fiercer Rage,
Deſtructive *War*, and all-devouring *Age*.
See, from *each Clime* the Learn'd their Incenſe bring;
Hear, in *all Tongues* conſenting *Paans* ring!
In Praiſe ſo juſt, let ev'ry Voice be join'd,
And fill the *Gen'ral Chorus* of *Mankind!*
Hail *Bards Triumphant!* born in happier Days;
*Immortal* Heirs of *Univerſal* Praiſe!
Whoſe Honours with Increaſe of Ages grow,
As Streams roll down, *enlarging* as they flow!
Nations *unborn* your mighty Names ſhall ſound,
And Worlds applaud that muſt not yet be *found!*

Oh may some Spark of your Celestial Fire
The last, the meanest of your Sons inspire,
That on weak Wings, from far, pursues your Flights;
*Glows* while he *reads*, but *trembles* as he *writes*,
To teach vain Wits a Science *little known*,
T'admire Superior Sense, and *doubt* their own!

OF all the Causes which conspire to blind
Man's erring Judgment, and misguide the Mind,
What the weak Head with strongest Bias rules,
Is *Pride*, the *never-failing Vice of Fools*.
Whatever Nature has in *Worth* deny'd,
She gives in large Recruits of *needful Pride*;
For as in *Bodies*, thus in *Souls*, we find
What wants in *Blood* and *Spirits*, swell'd with *Wind*:
*Pride*, where *Wit* fails, steps in to our Defence,
And fills up all the *mighty Void* of *Sense*!
If once right Reason drives that Cloud away,
*Truth* breaks upon us with *resistless Day*;
Trust not your self; but your Defects to know,
Make use of ev'ry *Friend*——and ev'ry *Foe*.

A *little Learning* is a dang'rous Thing;
Drink deep, or taſte not the *Pierian* Spring:
There *ſhallow Draughts* intoxicate the Brain,
And drinking *largely* ſobers us again.
Fir'd with the Charms fair *Science* does impart,
In *fearleſs Youth* we tempt the Heights of Art,
While from the bounded *Level* of our Mind,
*Short Views* we take, nor ſee the *Lengths behind*:
But *more advanc'd*, behold with ſtrange Surprize
New, diſtant Scenes of *endleſs* Science riſe!
So pleas'd at firſt the towring *Alps* we try;
Mount o'er the Vales, and ſeem to tread the Sky,
Th' *Eternal Snows* appear already paſt,
And the firſt *Clouds* and *Mountains* ſeem the laſt:
But *thoſe attain'd*, we tremble to ſurvey
The growing Labours of the lengthen'd Way,
Th' *increaſing* Proſpect tires our wandring Eyes,
Hills peep o'er Hills, and *Alps* on *Alps* ariſe!

† A perfect Judge will *read* each Work of Wit
With the ſame Spirit that its Author *writ*,

† *Diligenter legendum eſt, ac pœne ad ſcribendi ſollicitudinem: Nec per partes modo ſcrutanda ſunt omnia, ſed perlectus liber utique ex Integro reſumendus.* Quintilian.

Survey

Survey the *Whole*, nor seek slight Faults to find;
Where *Nature moves*, and *Rapture warms* the Mind;
Nor lose, for that malignant *dull Delight*,
The *gen'rous Pleasure* to be charm'd with Wit.
But in such Lays as neither *ebb*, nor *flow*,
*Correctly cold*, and *regularly low*,
That shunning Faults, one quiet *Tenour* keep;
We cannot *blame* indeed—— but we may *sleep*.
In Wit, as Nature, what affects our Hearts
Is not th' Exactness of peculiar Parts;
'Tis not a *Lip*, or *Eye*, we Beauty call,
But the joint Force and full *Result* of *all*.
Thus when we view some well proportion'd Dome,
(The *World*'s just Wonder, and ev'n *thine*, O *Rome*!)
No single Parts unequally surprize;
All comes *united* to th' admiring Eyes;
No monstrous Height, or Breadth, or Length appear;
The *Whole* at once is *Bold*, and *Regular*.

Whoever thinks a faultless Piece to see,
Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.
In ev'ry Work regard the *Writer's End*,
Since none can compass more than they *Intend*;

And if the *Means* be juſt, the *Conduct* true,
Applauſe, in ſpite of trivial Faults, is due.
As Men of Breeding, oft the Men of Wit
T' avoid *great Errors*, muſt the *leſs* commit,
Neglect the Rules each *Verbal Critick* lays,
For *not* to know ſome Trifles, is a Praiſe.
Moſt Criticks fond of ſome ſubſervient Art,
Still make the *Whole* depend upon a *Part*,
They talk of *Principles*, but Parts they prize,
And All to *one lov'd Folly* Sacrifice.

Once on a time, *La Mancha*'s Knight, they ſay,
A certain *Bard* encountring on the Way,
Diſcours'd in Terms as juſt, with Looks as Sage,
As e'er cou'd D——s, of the Laws o'th' Stage;
Concluding all were deſp'rate Sots and Fools,
That durſt depart from *Ariſtotle*'s Rules.
Our Author, happy in a Judge ſo nice,
Produc'd his Play, and beg'd the Knight's Advice;
Made him obſerve the *Subject* and the *Plot*,
The *Manners*, *Paſſions*, *Unities*, what not?
All which, exact to *Rule* were brought about,
Were but a *Combate in the Liſts* left out.

What!

*What! Leave the Combate out?* Exclaims the Knight;
Yes, or we must renounce the *Stagyrite*.
*Not so by Heav'n* (he answers in a Rage)
*Knights, Squires, and Steeds, must enter on the Stage.*
The Stage can ne'er so vaſt a Throng contain.
*Then build a New, or act it in a Plain.*

Thus Criticks, of leſs *Judgment* than *Caprice*,
*Curious*, not *Knowing*; not *exact*, but *nice*;
Form *ſhort Ideas*; and offend in *Arts*
(As moſt in *Manners*) by a *Love to Parts*.
Some to *Conceit* alone their Taſte confine,
And glitt'ring Thoughts ſtruck out at ev'ry Line;
Pleas'd with a Work where nothing's juſt or fit;
One *glaring Chaos* and *wild Heap* of *Wit*.
Poets like Painters, thus, unſkill'd to trace
The *naked Nature* and the *living Grace*,
With *Gold* and *Jewels* cover ev'ry Part,
And hide with *Ornaments* their *Want of Art*.
† *True Wit* is *Nature* to Advantage dreſt,
What oft was *Thought*, but ne'er ſo well *Expreſt*;



† *Naturam intuemur, hanc ſequamur; Id facillime accipiunt animi quod agnoſcunt.* Quintil. lib. 8. c. 3.

*Something*, whose *Truth* convinc'd at Sight we find,
That gives us back the Image of our Mind.
As Shades more ſweetly recommend the Light,
So modeſt Plainneſs ſets off ſprightly Wit:
For *Works* may have more *Wit* than does 'em good,
As *Bodies* periſh through Exceſs of *Blood*.
Others for *Language* all their Care expreſs,
And value *Books*, as Women *Men*, for *Dreſs*:
Their Praiſe is ſtill——*The* Style *is excellent*:
The *Senſe*, they humbly take upon Content.
*Words* are like *Leaves*; and where they moſt abound,
Much *Fruit* of *Senſe* beneath is rarely found.
*False Eloquence*, like the *Priſmatic Glaſs*,
Its gawdy Colours ſpreads on *ev'ry place*;
The Face of Nature we no more ſurvey;
All glares *alike*, without *Diſtinction* gay:
But *true Expreſſion*, like th' unchanging *Sun*,
*Clears*, and *improves* whate'er it ſhines upon,
It *gilds* all Objects, but it *alters* none.
Expreſſion is the *Dreſs* of Thought, and ſtill
Appears more *decent* as more *ſuitable*;

A vile Conceit in pompous Words expreſt,
Is like a Clown in regal Purple dreſt:
For diff'rent *Styles* with diff'rent *Subjects* ſort,
As ſeveral Garbs with Country, Town, and Court.
*Some by *Old Words* to Fame have made Pretence;
Ancients in *Phraſe*, meer Moderns in their *Senſe*!
Such *labour'd Nothings*, in ſo *ſtrange* a Style,
*Amaze* th' unlearn'd, and make the Learned *Smile*.
Unlucky, as *Fungoſo* in the † Play,
Theſe Sparks with aukward Vanity diſplay
What the Fine Gentlemen wore *Yeſterday*:
And but ſo mimick ancient Wits at beſt,
As Apes our Grandſires, in their *Doublets* dreſt.
In *Words*, as *Faſhions*, the ſame Rule will hold;
Alike Fantaſtick, if *too New*, or *Old*;
Be not the *firſt* by whom the *New* are try'd,
Nor yet the *laſt* to lay the *Old* aſide.



* *Abolita & abrogata retinere, inſolentiæ cujuſdam eſt, & frivola in parvis jactantiæ.* Quint. lib. 1. c. 6.

*Opus eſt ut Verba a vetuſtate repetita neque crebra ſint, neque manifeſta, quia nil eſt odioſius affectatione, nec utique ab ultimis repetita temporibus. Oratio, cujus ſumma virtus eſt perſpicuitas, quam ſit vitioſa ſi egeat interprete? Ergo ut novorum optima erunt maximè vetera, ita veterum maximè nova.* Idem.

† Ben. Johnſon's *Every Man in his Humour*.

* But moſt by *Numbers* judge a Poet's Song,
And *ſmooth* or *rough*, with ſuch, is *right* or *wrong*;
In the bright *Muſe* tho' thouſand *Charms* conſpire,
Her *Voice* is all theſe tuneful Fools admire;
Who haunt *Parnaſſus* but to pleaſe their Ear,
Not mend their Minds; as ſome to *Church* repair,
Not for the *Doctrine*, but the *Muſick* there.
These *Equal Syllables* alone require,
† Tho' oft the Ear the *open Vowels* tire;
While *Expletives* their feeble Aid *do* join;
And ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line;
While they ring round the ſame *unvary'd* Chimes,
With ſure *Returns* of *ſtill-expected* Rhymes.
Where-e'er you find *the cooling Weſtern Breeze*,
In the next Line, it *whiſpers thro' the Trees*:
If Chryſtal Streams *with pleaſing Murmurs creep*,
The Reader's threaten'd (not in vain) with *Sleep*.
Then, at the *laſt*, and *only* Couplet fraught
With ſome *unmeaning* Thing they call a *Thought*,

A

* *Quis populi ſermo eſt? quis enim? niſi carmina molli*
*Nunc demum numero fluere, ut per læve ſeveros*
*Effugit auriculas argutus: ſcit tendere verſum,*
*Non ſecus ac ſi oculo rubricam dirigat uno.* Perſius, Sat. 1.

† *Fugiemus crebras vocalium enſurſiones, quæ vaſtum atque hiantem orationem reddunt.* Cic. ad Herenn. lib. 4. *Vide etiam* Quintil. lib. 9. c. 4.

A *needless Alexandrine* ends the Song,
That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow Length [along.
Leave such to tune their own dull Rhimes, and know
What's *roundly smooth*, or *languishingly slow*;
And praise the *Easie Vigor* of a Line, [ness join.
Where *Denham*'s Strength, and *Waller*'s Sweet-
'Tis not enough no Harshness gives Offence,
The *Sound* must seem an *Eccho* to the *Sense*.
*Soft* is the Strain when *Zephyr* gently blows,
And the *smooth Stream* in *smoother Numbers* flows;
But when loud Surges lash the sounding Shore,
The *hoarse, rough Verse* shou'd like the *Torrent* roar.
When *Ajax* strives, some Rock's vast Weight to
throw,
The Line too *labours*, and the Words move *slow*;
Not so, when swift *Camilla* scours the Plain,
Flies o'er th' unbending Corn, and skims along the
Main.
Hear how † *Timotheus*' various Lays surprize,
And bid Alternate Passions fall and rise!



† Alexander's *Feast, or the Power of Musick; An Ode by Mr.* Dryden.

While, at each Change, the Son of *Lydian Jove*
Now burns with Glory, and then melts with Love;
Now his fierce Eyes with sparkling Fury glow,
Now Sighs steal out, and *Tears begin to flow*:
*Persians* and *Greeks* like Turns of Nature found,
And the World's Victor stood subdu'd by *Sound!*
*The Pow'r of Musick* all our Hearts allow;
And what *Timotheus* was, is *Dryden* now.

Avoid *Extreams*; and shun the Fault of such,
Who still are pleas'd *too little*, or *too much*.
At ev'ry Trifle scorn to take Offence;
That always shows *Great Pride*, or *Little Sense*:
Those *Heads*, as *Stomachs*, are not sure the best,
Which nauseate all, and nothing can digest.
Yet let not each gay *Turn* thy Rapture move,
For Fools *Admire*, but Men of Sense *Approve*;
As things seem *large* which we thro' *Mists* descry,
*Dulness* is ever apt to *Magnify*.

Some the *French* Writers, some our *own* despise;
The *Ancients* only, or the *Moderns* prize.
(Thus *Wit*, like *Faith*, by each Man is apply'd
To *one small Sect*, and All are *damn'd beside*.)
Meanly

Meanly they ſeek the Bleſſing to confine,
And force *that Sun* but on a *Part* to Shine,
Which not alone the *Southern Wit* ſublimes,
But ripens Spirits in cold *Northern Climes*;
Which from the firſt has ſhone on *Ages paſt*,
Enlights the *preſent*, and ſhall warm the *laſt*.
(Tho' *each* may feel *Increaſes* and *Decays*,
And ſee now *clearer* and now *darker Days*)
Regard not then if Wit be *Old* or *New*,
But blame the *Falſe*, and value ſtill the *True*.
Some ne'er advance a Judgment of their own,
But *catch* the *ſpreading Notion* of the Town;
They reaſon and conclude by *Precedent*,
And own *ſtale Nonſenſe* which they ne'er invent.
Some judge of Author's *Names*, not *Works*, and then
Nor praiſe nor damn the *Writings*, but the *Men*.
Of all this *Servile Herd* the worſt is He
That in *proud Dulneſs* joins with *Quality*,
A conſtant Critick at the Great-man's Board,
To fetch and carry Nonſenſe for my Lord.
What woful ſtuff this Madrigal wou'd be,
In ſome ſtarv'd Hackny Soneteer, or me?

Thus let a *Lord* once own the happy Lines,
How the Wit *brightens*! How the Style *refines*!
Before *his* sacred Name flies ev'ry Fault,
And each *exalted* Stanza *teems* with *Thought*!
The *Vulgar* thus through *Imitation* err;
As oft the *Learn'd* by being *Singular*;
So much they scorn the Crowd, that if the Throng
By *Chance* go right, they *purposely* go wrong:
So Schismatics the *plain Believers* quit,
And are but damn'd for having *too much Wit*.
Some praise at Morning what they blame at [Night;
But always think the *last* Opinion *right*.
A Muse by these is like a Mistress us'd,
This hour she's *idoliz'd*, the next *abus'd*;
While their weak Heads, like Towns unfortify'd,
'Twixt Sense and Nonsense daily change their Side.
Ask them the Cause; *They're wiser still*, they say;
And still To Morrow's wiser than To Day.
We think our *Fathers* Fools, so wise we grow;
Our wiser *Sons*, no doubt, will think *us* so.
Once *School-Divines* this zealous Isle o'erspread;
Who knew most *Sentences* was deepest read;
Faith,

Faith, Gospel, All, seem'd made to be *Disputed*,
And none had *Sense enough to be Confuted*:
*Scotists* and *Thomists*, now, in Peace remain,
Amidst their *kindred* Cobwebs in *Duck-Lane*.
If *Faith* it self has *diff'rent Dresses* worn,
What wonder *Modes* in *Wit* shou'd take their Turn?
Oft, leaving what is Natural and fit,
The *currant Folly* proves our *ready Wit*,
And Authors think their Reputation safe,
Which lives as long as *Fools* are pleas'd to *Laugh*.
Some valuing those of their own *Side*, or *Mind*,
Still make themselves the measure of Mankind;
Fondly we think we honour Merit then,
When we but praise *Our selves* in *Other Men*.
Parties in *Wit* attend on those of *State*,
And publick Faction doubles private Hate.
*Pride*, *Malice*, *Folly*, against *Dryden* rose,
In various Shapes of *Parsons*, *Criticks*, *Beaus*;
But *Sense* surviv'd, when *merry Jests* were past;
For rising Merit will *buoy up* at last.
Might he return, and bless once more our Eyes,
New *S——s* and new *M——ns* must arise:

Nay

May ſhou'd great *Homer* lift his awful Head,
*Zoilus* again would ſtart up from the Dead,
*Envy* will *Merit*, as its *Shade*, purſue;
But like a Shadow, *proves* the *Subſtance* too.
For envy'd *Wit*, like *Sol* eclips'd, makes known
Th' *oppoſing Body*'s Groſſneſs, not its *own*.
When firſt that Sun too powerful Beams diſplays,
It draws up Vapours which obſcure its Rays;
But ev'n thoſe Clouds at laſt adorn its Way,
Reflect new Glories, and augment the Day.

Be thou the *firſt* true Merit to befriend,
*His* Praiſe is loſt, who ſtays till *All* commend.
Short is the Date, alas, of Modern Rhymes,
And 'tis but juſt to let 'em live *betimes*.
No longer now that Golden Age appears,
When *Patriarch-Wits* ſurviv'd a *thouſand Years*;
Now Length of *Fame* (our ſecond Life) is loſt,
And bare *Threeſcore* is all ev'n That can boaſt:
Our Sons their Father's *failing Language* ſee,
And ſuch as *Chaucer* is, ſhall *Dryden* be.
So when the faithful Pencil has deſign'd
Some *fair Idea* of the Maſter's Mind,

Where

Where a *new World* leaps out at his command,
And ready Nature waits upon his Hand;
When the ripe Colours *soften* and *unite*,
And sweetly *melt* into just Shade and Light;
When mellowing Time does full Perfection give,
And each Bold Figure just begins to *Live*;
The *treach'rous Colours* in few Years decay,
And all the bright Creation fades away!

Unhappy *Wit*, like most mistaken Things,
Attones not for that *Envy* which it brings.
In *Youth* alone its empty Praise we boast,
But soon the short-liv'd Vanity is lost!
Like some fair *Flow'r* that in the *Spring* does rise,
And gaily blooms, but ev'n in blooming *dies*.
What is this *Wit* which does our Cares employ?
The *Owner's Wife*, that *other Men* enjoy;
'Tis most our *Trouble* when 'tis most *admir'd*;
The more we *give*, the more is still *requir'd*:
The Fame with Pains we gain, but lose with ease;
Sure *some* to *vex*, but never *all* to *please*;
'Tis what the *Vicious fear*, the *Virtuous shun*;
By *Fools* 'tis *hated*, and by *Knaves undone!*

Too

Too much does *Wit* from *Ignorance* undergo,
Ah let not *Learning* too commence its Foe!
Of old, those met *Rewards* who could *excell*,
And such were *Prais'd* as but *endeavour'd well*:
Tho' *Triumphs* were to *Gen'rals* only due,
*Crowns* were reserv'd to grace the *Soldiers* too.
Now, they who reach *Parnassus'* lofty Crown,
Employ their Pains to spurn some others down;
And while Self-Love each jealous Writer rules,
*Contending Wits* become the *Sport of Fools*.
But still the *Worst* with most Regret commend,
For each *Ill Author* is as bad a *Friend*.
To what base Ends, and by what abject Ways,
Are Mortals urg'd by *Sacred Lust* of *Praise*!
Ah ne'er so *dire* a *Thirst* of Glory boast,
Nor in the *Critick* let the *Man* be lost!
*Good-Nature* and *Good-Sense* must ever join;
To Err is *Humane*; to Forgive, *Divine*.
But if in *Noble Minds* some Dregs remain,
Not yet purg'd off, of Spleen and Sow'r Disdain,
Discharge that Rage on more provoking Crimes,
Nor fear a Dearth in these Flagitious Times.

No

No Pardon vile *Obscenity* should find,
Tho' *Wit* and *Art* conspire to move your Mind;
But *Dulness* with *Obscenity* must prove
As Shameful sure as *Impotence* in *Love*.
In the fat Age of Pleasure, Wealth, and Ease,
Sprung the rank Weed, and thriv'd with large In-[crease;
When *Love* was all an easie Monarch's Care,
Seldom at *Council*, never in a *War*:
*Jilts* rul'd the State, and Statesmen *Farces* writ;
Nay *Wits* had *Pensions*, and *young Lords* had *Wit*:
The Fair sate panting at a *Courtier*'s *Play*,
And not a Mask went *un-improv'd* away:
The modest Fan was lifted up no more,
And Virgins *smil'd* at what they *blush'd* before—
The following Licence of a Foreign Reign
Did all the Dregs of bold *Socinus* drain;
Then *first* the *Belgian Morals* were extoll'd;
We their *Religion* had, and they our *Gold*:
Then Unbelieving Priests reform'd the Nation,
And taught more *Pleasant* Methods of Salvation;
Where Nav'ns free Subjects might their *Rights* dis-[pute,
Lest *God himself* shou'd seem too *Absolute*.

*Pulpits*

*Pulpits* their *Sacred Satire* learn'd to ſpare;
And Vice *admir'd* to find a Flatt'rer *there*!
Encourag'd thus, Wit's *Titans* brav'd the Skies
And the Preſs groan'd with Licenc'd *Blaſphemies*.
These Monſters, Criticks! with your Darts engage,
Here point your Thunder, and exhauſt your Rage!
Yet ſhun their Fault, who, *Scandalouſly nice*,
Will needs *miſtake* an Author *into Vice*;
All ſeems Infected that th' Infected ſpy,
As all looks yellow to the Jaundic'd Eye.

Learn then what *Morals* Criticks ought to ſhow,
For 'tis but *half* a *Judge's Task*, to *Know*.
'Tis not enough, Wit, Art, and Learning join;
In all you ſpeak, let Truth and Candor ſhine:
That not alone what to your *Judgment*'s due,
All may allow; but ſeek your *Friendſhip* too.

Be *ſilent* always when you *doubt* your Senſe;
And ſpeak, tho' *ſure*, with *ſeeming Diffidence*:
Some poſitive, perſiſting Fops we know,
That, if *once wrong*, will needs be *always ſo*;
But you, with Pleaſure own your Errors paſt,
And make, each Day, a *Critick* on the laſt.

'Tis not enough your Counſel ſtill be *true*;
*Blunt Truths* more Miſchief than *nice Falſhoods* do;
Men muſt be *taught* as if you taught them not;
And things *ne'er known* propos'd as Things *forgot*.
Without *Good Breeding*, Truth is not approv'd;
*That* only makes *Superior* Senſe *belov'd*.

Be Niggards of Advice on no Pretence;
For the *worſt Avarice* is that of *Senſe*.
With mean Complacence ne'er betray your Truſt,
Nor be ſo *Civil* as to prove *Unjuſt*:
Fear not the Anger of the Wiſe to raiſe;
Thoſe beſt can *bear Reproof*, who *merit Praiſe*.

'Twere well, might Criticks ſtill this Freedom take;

But *Appius* reddens at each Word you ſpeak,
And *ſtares, Tremendous!* with a threatning Eye;
Like ſome *fierce Tyrant* in *Old Tapeſtry!*
Fear moſt to tax an *Honourable* Fool,
Whoſe Right it is, *uncenſur'd* to be dull;
Such without *Wit* are Poets when they pleaſe,
As without *Learning* they can take *Degrees*.
Leave dang'rous *Truths* to unſucceſsful *Satyrs*,
And *Flattery* to fulſome *Dedicators*,

Whom, when they *Praiſe*, the World believes
no more,
Than when they promiſe to give *Scribling* o'er.
'Tis beſt ſometimes your Cenſure to reſtrain,
And *charitably* let the *dull* be *vain*.
Your Silence there is better than your *Spite*,
For who can *rail* ſo long as they can *write*?
Still humming on, their drowzy Courſe they keep,
And *laſh'd* ſo long, like *Tops*, are laſh'd *aſleep*.
*Falſe Steps* but help them to renew the Race,
As after *Stumbling*, Jades will mend their Pace.
What Crouds of theſe, impenitently bold,
In *Sounds* and jingling Syllables grown old,
Still run on Poets, in a raging Vein,
Ev'n to the Dregs and *Squeezings* of the *Brain*;
Strain out the laſt, dull droppings of their Senſe,
And Rhyme with all the *Rage* of *Impotence*!
Such ſhameleſs *Bards* we have; and yet 'tis true,
There are as mad, abandon'd *Criticks* too.
* The Bookful Blockhead, ignorantly read,
With *Loads* of *Learned Lumber* in his Head,
With

* *Nihil pejus eſt iis, qui paullum aliquid ultra primas litteras progreſſi, falſam ſibi ſcientiæ perſuaſionem induerunt. Nam & cedere præcipiendi peritis indignantur, & velut jure quodam poteſtatis, quo ferè hoc hominum genus intumeſcit, imperioſi, atque interim ævientes, Stultitiam ſuam perdocent.* Quintil. lib. 1. ch. 1.

With his own Tongue ſtill edifies his Ears,
And always *Liſt'ning to Himſelf* appears.
All Books he reads, and all he reads aſſails,
From *Dryden's Fables* down to *D——y's Tales*.
With *him*, moſt Authors ſteal their Works, or buy;
*Garth* did not write his own *Diſpenſary*.
Name a new *Play*, and *he's* the *Poet's Friend*,
Nay ſhow'd his Faults—but *when would Poets mend?*
No Place ſo Sacred from ſuch Fops is barr'd,
Nor is *Paul's Church* more ſafe than *Paul's Church-yard*:
Nay, fly to *Altars*; there they'll talk you dead;
For *Fools* ruſh in where *Angels* fear to tread.
Diſtruſtful *Senſe* with modeſt Caution ſpeaks;
It ſtill *looks home*, and ſhort Excurſions makes;
But *ratling Nonſenſe* in full *Vollies* breaks;
And never ſhock'd, and never turn'd aſide,
*Burſts out*, reſiſtleſs, with a thund'ring Tyde!

But where's the Man, who Counſel *can* beſtow,
Still *pleas'd* to *teach*, and yet not *proud* to *know?*
Unbiaſs'd, or by *Favour*, or by *Spite*;
Not *dully* prepoſſeſt, or *blindly* right;
Tho' Learn'd, *well-bred*; and tho' well-bred, *ſincere*;
*Modeſtly bold*, and *Humanly ſevere?*

Who to a *Friend* his *Faults* can freely ſhow,
And gladly praiſe the *Merit* of a *Foe*?
Bleſt with a *Taſte* exact, yet unconfin'd;
A *Knowledge* both of *Books* and *Humankind*;
Gen'rous *Converſe*; a *Soul* exempt from *Pride*;
And *Love to Praiſe*, with *Reaſon* on his Side?

Such once were *Criticks*; ſuch the Happy *Few*,
*Athens* and *Rome* in better Ages knew.
The mighty *Stagyrite* firſt left the Shore,
Spread all his Sails, and durſt the Deeps explore;
He ſteer'd ſecurely, and diſcover'd far,
*Led* by the Light of the *Mæonian Star*.
Poets, a *Race* long unconfin'd and free,
Still fond and proud of *Savage Liberty*,
Receiv'd his Laws; and ſtood convinc'd 'twas fit
Who conquer'd *Nature*, ſhou'd preſide o'er *Wit*.

*Horace* ſtill charms with graceful Negligence,
And without Method *talks* us into Senſe,
Does like a *Friend*, familiarly convey
The *trueſt Notions* in the *eaſieſt way*.
He, who ſupream in Judgment, as in Wit,
Might boldly cenſure, as he boldly writ,

Yet

Yet judg'd with Coolneſs tho' he ſung with Fire,
His *Precepts* teach but what his *Works* inſpire.
*Our Criticks* take a contrary Extream,
They *judge* with *Fury*, but they *write* with *Fle'me*:
Nor ſuffers *Horace* more in wrong *Tranſlations*
By *Wits*, than *Criticks* in as wrong *Quotations*.
See * *Dionyſius Homer*'s Thoughts refine,
And call new Beauties forth from ev'ry Line!
Fancy and Art in gay *Petronius* pleaſe,
The *Scholar's Learning*, with the *Courtier's Eaſe*.
In grave *Quintilian*'s copious Work we find
The juſteſt *Rules*, and cleareſt *Method* join'd.
Thus *uſeful Arms* in Magazines we place,
All rang'd in *Order*, and diſpos'd with *Grace*,
Nor thus alone the curious Eye to pleaſe,
But to be *found*, when Need requires, with Eaſe.
The *Muſes* ſure *Longinus* did inſpire,
And bleſt *their Critick* with a *Poet's* Fire.
An ardent *Judge*, who zealous in his Truſt,
With *Warmth* gives Sentence, yet is always *Juſt*;
Whoſe own *Example* ſtrengthens all his Laws,
And *Is himſelf* that great *Sublime* he draws.

* Dionyſius *of* Halicarnaſſus.

Thus long ſucceeding Critieks juſtly reign'd,
*Licence* repreſs'd, and uſeful *Laws* ordain'd.
*Learning* and *Rome* alike in Empire grew,
And *Arts* ſtill *follow'd* where her *Eagles flew.*
From the ſame Foes, at laſt, both felt their Doom,
And the ſame Age ſaw *Learning* fall, and *Rome.*
With *Tyranny*, then *Superſtition* join'd,
As that the *Body*, this enſlav'd the *Mind*;
Much was *Believ'd*, but little *underſtood*,
And to be *dull* was conſtru'd to be *good*;
A ſecond Deluge Learning thus o'er-run,
And the *Monks* finiſh'd what the *Goths* begun.

At length *Eraſmus*, that *great*, *injur'd* Name,
(The *Glory* of the Prieſthood, and the *Shame*!)
Stemm'd the wild Torrent of a *barb'rous Age*,
And drove thoſe *Holy Vandals* off the Stage.

But ſee! each *Muſe*, in *Leo*'s Golden Days,
Starts from her Trance, and trims her wither'd Bays!
*Rome*'s ancient *Genius*, o'er its *Ruins* ſpread,
Shakes off the Duſt, and rears his rev'rend Head!
Then *Sculpture* and her *Siſter-Arts* revive;
Stones leap'd to *Form*, and *Rocks* began to *live*;

With

With *sweeter Notes* each *rising Temple* rung;
A *Raphael* painted, and a † *Vida* sung!
Immortal *Vida!* on whose honour'd Brow
The Poet's *Bays* and Critick's *Ivy* grow:
*Cremona* now shall ever boast thy Name,
As next in Place to *Mantua*, next in Fame!
But soon by Impious Arms from *Latium* chas'd,
Their *ancient Bounds* the banish'd Muses past;
Thence Arts o'er all the *Northern World* advance;
But *Critic Learning* flourish'd most in *France*.
The *Rules*, a Nation born to serve, obeys,
And *Boileau* still in Right of *Horace* sways.
But *we*, brave *Britains*, *Foreign Laws* despis'd,
And kept *unconquer'd*, and *uncivilized*,
Fierce for the *Liberties of Wit*, and bold,
We *still* defy'd the *Romans*, as *of old*.
Yet *some* there were, among the *sounder Few*
Of those who *less presum'd*, and *better knew*,
Who durst assert the *juster Ancient Cause*,
And here restor'd Wit's *Fundamental Laws*.

Such

† M. Hieronymus Vida, *an excellent* Latin *Poet, who writ an Art of Poetry in Verse. He flourish'd in the time of* Leo *the Tenth.*

Such was *Roſcommon*—not more learn'd than good,
With Manners gen'rous as his Noble Blood;
To him the Wit of *Greece* and *Rome* was known,
And ev'ry Author's Merit, but his own.
Such late was *Walſh*,——the Muſes Judge and Friend,
Who juſtly knew to blame or to commend;
To Failings mild, but zealous for Deſert;
The *cleareſt Head*, and the *ſincereſt Heart*.
This humble Praiſe, lamented Shade! receive,
This Praiſe at leaſt a grateful Muſe may give!
The Muſe, whoſe early Voice you taught to Sing,
Preſcrib'd her Heights, and prun'd her tender Wing,
(Her Guide now loſt) no more attempts to riſe,
But in low Numbers ſhort Excurſions tries.
Content, if hence th' Unlearn'd their Wants may view,
The Learn'd reflect on what before they knew.
Careleſs of *Cenſure*, nor too fond of *Fame*,
Still pleas'd to *praiſe*, yet not afraid to *blame*;
Averſe alike to *Flatter*, or *Offend*,
Not *free* from Faults, nor yet too vain to *mend*.

FINIS.

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